

**Be Ye Reconciled
To God: A look at
the Atonement**

P.P. Waldenstrom

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BE YE RECONCILED TO GOD

(a Look at the Atonement)

BY

P.P. WALDENSTROM

RECONCILIATION

The salvation which God has in Christ prepared for the world is in the Bible called sometimes redemption, sometimes reconciliation, or propitiation. All these expressions, to save, to redeem, to reconcile, denote the same thing, seen from different sides. The term reconciliation, however, sets forth the real essence of salvation. For salvation consists just in the reconciliation of man to God.

This subject is of extraordinary importance in consequence of the unhappy questioning which has been going on among us these late years concerning this subject. It is necessary to examine what the word of God teaches, as also, in the light of the word, to test what men have taught aside from the word of God which has so often perplexed simple souls.

Not only in the Christian religion, but also in heathenism has the necessity of reconciliation made itself felt. There is a witness within man that it is impossible for man to obtain peace without reconciliation. Even pagans feel that their happiness depends upon their being in a right relation to God; but they also feel that now they are not in a right relation to God. Their many sacrifices, ceremonies, tormentings of self, pilgrimages, etc., are just so many cries after reconciliation unto God. This feeling of theirs is no error, but a deep truth. The Holy Scriptures testify with the greatest possible decisiveness of the necessity of reconciliation. The whole object of Christ's coming and work in the world was reconciliation. Every religion--pagan, Jewish, and Christian--penetrated with the expressed or implied need of reconciliation. Christ was sent into the world by the Father, not to stifle or to explain away this need, but to confirm, strengthen, and satisfy it.

But then arises this question, whether it was God, or man or perhaps both parties, that needed to be reconciled. And in this question it is that the thoughts of God and man separate as far as heaven and earth. Just as soon as Adam had sinned, he received in his heart another image of God than he had had. Instead of returning, as a fallen son, to God with confidence, he fled from Him with terror, hid himself from Him and endeavored to conceal the truth from Him. The change which had taken place in Adam's heart made him believe that God, also, had changed.

It is this thought about God that runs through the whole of the worship of the heathen. The heathen imagine God to be a dreadful being, and they always regard the hindrance to man's salvation as lying in a certain wrath or fierceness that has filled the heart of God in consequence of man's sin. Their worship is therefore always marked by fear and bondage. It is with reference to this that Paul says to the Christians: "Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption" (Rom. 8:15). Therefore, the reconciliation which the heathen fancy is always a reconciliation which has its source in man, and its aim to appease God. They have only the light of nature to judge by, and therefore they judge of God according to what they are themselves. This wrath in the heart of God they wish to appease, partly by gifts which they offer to him, as gold, silver, animals, and human beings, and partly by self-torture or pain inflicted on themselves. They think that His wrath will allow itself to be soothed by such means, and especially by seeing the sinful suffer. They well know that their own wrath is soothed by gifts, or by causing sufferings, or by seeing him suffer who has offended them; and so they judge of God accordingly. Such is their darkness. All their worship of God proceeds from the principle that God is angry with them.

But, alas! this idea we find not only among the heathen, but it is so deep-rooted in all human nature, that it seeks to maintain its hold even where the word of God is known and read. From this wrong view of God it comes that men often consider Christ, whom God in His grace has sent to reconcile us to Himself, as one on whom God has poured out His wrath, in order that He might be gracious to us. Yea, many dear children of God view this as the very essence of Christ's work. They think that they never can escape the wrath of God, unless it has been poured out upon someone else in their stead. In their opinion, the chief significance of Christ is that He be a shelter or shield against God, or so to speak, a

lightning rod for his wrath, in order that they may feel safe before Him.

Contrary to all such perverse imaginations, the Scriptures teach that no change took place in God's disposition towards man in consequence of his sin; that, therefore, it was not God who needed to be reconciled to man, but that it was man who needed to be reconciled to God; and that, consequently, reconciliation is a work which proceeds from God and is directed towards man, and aims not to appease God, but to cleanse man from sin, and to restore him to a right relation with God.

Dreadful is the injury and desolation which the sin of man has caused, but the desolation of changing the disposition of God, that is a thing man's sin has not been able to do. "God is love" (I John 4:8,16). God has not only been love or become love, but he is love from everlasting to everlasting, perfect love. But perfect love can never be diminished, because it would then no longer be perfect.

Consequently, the love of God never needed to be restored by any propitiation, because it was never lost. God loves because he is love, and he continued to be love, in spite of our fall into sin. God's love for the world was not of one kind before the fall, and of another kind after the fall, and, again, it did not become of still another kind after the death of Christ. Therefore Paul does not say that God increased his love to us by Christ dying for us, nor that the change supposed to have taken place in God's disposition by our fall was remedied or removed, but he does say this: "God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). And John does not say: By Christ laying down his life for us, the love of God has been restored to us. No, he says this: "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us" (I John 3:16). And again (Revised Version): "Herein was the love of God manifested in us that God hath sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (I John 4:9,10).

When the Lord Himself would by pictures illustrate this disposition of God, He related the stories of the lost sheep, the lost piece of money, and the prodigal, or the lost son (Luke 15). The father of that prodigal son had felt grief, yes, deep grief, but his love had not in the least suffered decrease; he loves his son none the less now than before. The shepherd

had felt grief for the lost sheep, but he so loved it that for its sake he left the ninety and nine, and went after the one that was lost. And mark you: Christ is using these illustrations, not in order to show the disposition of God's heart before the fall, nor what it should become after His death, but in order to show us how it always had been and always is towards sinners.

THE WRATH OF GOD

"Well" -- thus someone objects -- "this may indeed be true, but the wrath of God cannot be denied. What shall we say to all that which the Scriptures teach concerning the wrath of God? Did not the wrath of God need to be appeased? And did not this take place through the death of Christ?"

Let us see what God in His word says on this subject. We would say with David: "The testimonies of the Lord are sure" (Psa. 93:5). Is it, then, anywhere written in the word of God that God's wrath was to be appeased through Christ's death, or that it has been appeased through Christ's death? If it is thus written in the word of God, then it must be held as true; if not, it must be given up. The question is, therefore: Is it written? To this it must be replied: No, it is nowhere thus written. In the whole Bible there is no such passage. No prophet, no evangelist, no apostle, not John the Baptist, nor Christ either, has taught that the wrath of God was to be appeased through the death of Christ; and then it is not advisable for us to put any such doctrine into the word of God.

But, what, then, is the wrath of God? By the wrath of God may be meant that God hates all sin and unrighteousness. But this wrath of God can certainly never be appeased or changed. Just think how dreadful it would be if God should cease to hate sin. Not to hate sin evinces an unrighteous person. If you see a man that does not hate sin, you can at once say: This man is not like God; this is not a righteous man. Hence we can readily understand that Christ's death did not make God to cease hating sin.

But by God's wrath can also be meant that God is displeased with, threatens, and punishes all who live in sin. But neither is this wrath of God at all quenched or appeased by the death of Christ. Nor can it be changed. Paul says: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven

against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" Rom. 1:18). Yea, after the death of Christ this wrath has manifested itself more dreadfully than at any time before, as in the destruction of Jerusalem. When the Lord predicted this destruction He expressed Himself thus: "There shall be wrath upon this people" (Luke 21:23). Even today, it is true of all who live in sin, that they are "the children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3). In Eph. 5:6 and Col. 3:6 the apostle says that because of sins "the wrath of God cometh upon the children of disobedience."

This wrath of God is no more a bar to His love than the true fatherly wrath in a man is a bar to his fatherly love. A father cannot be pleased with his child that lives in sin; but he can so love it, that if he could save it, he would willingly die for it. And he punishes it, that if possible he may save it. So, likewise, does God. Least of all did Christ come into the world to change this relation, because He Himself has the same displeasure as the Father toward those who live in sin. We read in Mark 3:5 about Him, that "He looked round about on them with anger," and in this wrath was the same divine earnestness as in the wrath of the Father.

By the wrath of God may, also, be meant that at the last day, at the end of this age, He will forever separate from Himself all those whom it has not been possible "to renew again unto repentance" (Heb. 6:6), but who have obstinately defied all His endeavors to save them. This is what the Bible calls "the wrath to come." Of this wrath John the Baptist says to the Pharisees: "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" (Matt. 3:7; Luke 3:7). This wrath, surely, is not appeased; but just according to the threatenings of God it shall, at the last day, come upon all the ungodly, as Paul says: "After thy hardness and impenitent heart thou treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God" (Rom. 2:5). Yea, Christ is so far from having appeased this wrath, that just He Himself is the one who will bring about and execute the sentence of God's wrath upon the ungodly. Therefore this wrath is called also the wrath of the Lamb, as when in Rev. 6:16 it is said that the ungodly shall say to the mountains and to the rocks: "Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb."

It is wrath against the person, and hatred of the person, which excludes or bars love. This hatred may be called personal, because its object is not sin, but the person, and because it wishes the person evil. Such is

the wrath of the devil, as it is said in Rev. 12:12: "The devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time." And again, in I Pet. 5:8: "Your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." Such wrath the heathen think their gods possess, and therefore they labor to appease them. Such wrath also, is often found among men, as the Scriptures say: "Their throat is an open sepulchre; the poison of asps is under their lips: whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: their feet are swift to shed blood" (Rom. 3:13-15). This personal wrath will often allow itself to be appeased, sometimes by gifts, and sometimes by getting revenge. But this wrath in man is not a remnant of the image of God, but, on the contrary, it is a part of that poison which the serpent at the fall poured into the heart of man. In God no such wrath exists, for in Him is nothing sinful or devilish. But if this wrath does not exist in God, then neither is there any need of appeasing it. No, "God is love," and love excludes all personal wrath.

Of another matter Paul speaks in Rom. 5:8-10, where he says: "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him: for if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." The apostle speaks here of something past when he says that we were sinners, and that Christ died for us. Afterwards he speaks of something present when he says that we now are justified in the blood of Jesus, now are reconciled to God by the death of His Son. Finally he speaks of something yet future when he says that we shall be saved from wrath through Him, we shall be saved in His life. The apostle does not say one word concerning the appeasing of God's wrath, but speaks only of our salvation from wrath. And this salvation he represents as something future. He does not say that we are saved from wrath, but that "we shall be saved from wrath." But what "we" does the apostle mean when he says: "We shall be saved from wrath"? He explains it himself when he speaks of us who were sinners, but now are justified in the blood of Jesus. Consequently, this passage treats of the future deliverance of the believers from wrath. He says also that it will be accomplished by or in Christ's life; which shows plainly that it has not been accomplished by or in Christ's death.

But what, then, is that future salvation of which the apostle speaks? It is the salvation from the wrath to come. Of this salvation Paul speaks to the Christians in Thessalonica: "Ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered (more correctly, delivereth, as the Revised Version has it) us from the wrath to come" (I Thess. 1:9,10). But what, then, is "the wrath to come"? It is the judgment of wrath which will come upon the world at the coming of our Lord, and which He, our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, will execute. From this judgment of wrath the righteous shall be saved. As God, before He let his judgment come upon Sodom, sent angels to rescue Lot; as Joshua, before he let the judgment come upon Jericho, sent a messenger into that city to take thence righteous Rahab; as the Lord, before Jerusalem was destroyed, gave His believers a sign to flee and thus in time saved them from that terrible judgment of wrath which swept over that city: so the Lord, the living Saviour, will take away His own, the righteous, from the judgments of wrath which shall come upon the world at His coming. This is expressed in the eighth of Revelation by forbidding the angels, who had the power to hurt the earth and the sea and the trees, to do any hurt until the servants of God had been sealed on their foreheads with the seal of the living God. A type of this deliverance of the believers from the wrath to come was the deliverance of the children of Israel from the judgment of wrath which befell the Egyptians through the angel of death. By their marking the door posts of their houses with the blood of the passover lamb, God delivered them from the general destruction which elsewhere swept over the country.

However the subject under consideration may be turned, there is nothing in God that could have been changed, whether by the fall of man or by the work of Christ. His love has not been disturbed by the fall of man, nor has His displeasure of evil undergone any change by the death of Christ. The latter (His displeasure of evil) belongs to His being, and is an expression of His righteousness as well as the former (His love). Neither has the manifestation of His love been restrained by the fall of man, because God has manifested His love in a higher degree after the fall of man than He ever did before. For the sending of the Son into the world is a manifestation of love, which in gloriousness so far surpasses everything else as the brightness of the sun surpasses the stars. Neither has the manifestations of His wrath or displeasure been caused to cease

by the death of Christ, for such are yet seen in all the punishments which God sends upon single individuals and upon communities; and at the coming again of Christ, such wrath will manifest itself more dreadfully than ever before in the judgment which will come upon the world.

From this we can easily understand why the Bible never speaks of the reconciling of God, while all the religions of the heathen are occupied in appeasing Him (or what they suppose to be gods). To speak of reconciling God is just as foreign to the Bible as to speak of reconciling Christ. If the blessed words of our Saviour -- "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9) -- are true, there is in the Son the same love, the same righteousness, the same wrath, etc., as in the Father. Hence, if one of them needed to be reconciled, then also the other needed, or needs, to be reconciled. As it is a fact of great significance that the Scriptures never speak of Christ being reconciled, of His wrath being appeased, or the like, so it is a fact of equally great significance that the Scriptures never speak of the Father being reconciled. And as little as one can say that Christ is reconciled when His disapproval of a sinner is turned into approval, because the sinner permits himself to be conquered by His love and believes in Him, just as little can one say that God, the Father, is reconciled when His disapproval of a sinner is, in the same way, turned into approval by the sinner's repentance and conversion. The love of God and the love of the Lamb are one, and the wrath of God and the wrath of the Lamb are one; and the Lamb is the one that executes both the purposes of God's love and judgments of His wrath.

THE OLD TESTAMENT SACRIFICES

But the sacrifices -- did not the Old Testament sacrifices with their blood betoken the necessity of reconciling God? For a correct understanding of the Old, as well as of the New Testament, this question is of the greatest importance. We have already seen that in all the heathen sacrifices there was the underlying thought, that God must be reconciled; but here the question is, whether the sacrifices ordained by God Himself had the same significance.

Concerning the Old Testament sacrifices men have often thought this way: "The righteousness, or justice, of God demanded that sin should be punished. Now, if the sinner himself were to escape punishment,

someone else must suffer in his place. In no other way, and on no other ground, could sin ever be forgiven. Such penal suffering Christ was to endure for the whole world. On the strength of this coming payment God could in the Old Testament times forgive sins, and He always kept this ground before the people in the ever recurring bloody sacrifices." May we now examine this way of reasoning in the wonderful light of the word of God.

First and foremost it is to be noticed that there is no place in the word of God where it is said that God's justice, or righteousness, demanded that the punishment must be endured by someone if sin should be forgiven. On the contrary, just the opposite is written in clear examples and words in the Bible. A most remarkable illustration of this we can read in the history of Nineveh. When Nineveh was living in sin and wickedness, God caused the announcement to be made by the prophet Jonah that the city should perish. But, when Nineveh repented, it remained standing. How could God in that case take back His word? Did He get a satisfying payment that induced Him to do so? Not at all. The judgment of God concerned Nineveh living in sin. If Nineveh had continued in sin, then also the judgment would have been fulfilled. But Nineveh repented. "And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them: and he did it not" (Jonah 3:10).

Of this the whole of Ezekiel 18 speaks very fully. Let us read portions of what the Lord says there: "But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all My statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die. All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him: in his righteousness that he hath done he shall live. Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God: and not that he should return from his way, and live? But when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked man doeth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he has trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die" (verses 21-24). Thus we read that if a sinner is converted and made righteous, then all his former transgressions shall not be mentioned unto him, and that on the ground which the Lord Himself there states: to

wit, that He has no pleasure at all in the death of the wicked, but rather that he should turn from his sins, and live.

That the Lord judges in the same way also in the New Testament we learn from the parable of the ten thousand talents (Matt. 18:23-35). We read there that when the servant who owed ten thousand talents came to render an account, "he fell down and worshipped, saying, 'Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all'. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt." This conduct our Lord sets forth as an expression of how God forgives sinners, and a likeness of how He requires also His disciples to forgive. There was no question of payment or compensation which some one else should make instead of the debtor. The Lord never did say, "I will forgive you all your debt, for another has paid it in your stead."

In the 7th of Luke our Lord cites a similar instance. He says: "There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he freely forgave them both." Neither is there in this passage the least intimation that their pardon was due to the fact that another had paid in their stead. Nor has the Lord ever represented it as unrighteous either for Himself or for us to forgive without compensation. And if forgiveness could not otherwise take place, except on the ground of compensation, why then has God never said so in His word? Yea, why has He on the contrary, represented just the opposite as the right way?

All talk of payment for the debt of sin is wholly foreign to the word of God. To pay the debt or guilt of sin would imply that, by a payment, sin could be caused to cease to be guilt. But all sin is guilt; and no payment can make sin to be anything else than guilt, or transgression, or crime. The debt or guilt of sin can be forgiven, but never paid. Therefore, it can also be clearly seen, that in those Bible passages, where the forgiveness of sins is likened to a release from a debt of money (Luke 7:41; Matt. 18:24-27) not a word is said about payment, but only about remission. A paid debt is no longer any debt; and if the debt or guilt of the sin of the world is paid, then the world has no longer any debt, and has no guilt; its sins are then no longer debts, and there is nothing of guilt or criminality about them. Read, for instance, the first chapters of Romans, and there you can see whether the world has yet any moral debt or guilt, or not. But the debt can be forgiven; and how that is done the Lord teaches us by the prophet

Isaiah when he says: "Come now and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow: though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isa. 1:18). What we need is to get rid of our debt in whatever way that now may be done. According to our way of judging by nature, a payment to God would be necessary; but according to God's way of judging, sins are forgiven "without money and without price." A paid forgiveness is no forgiveness; just as the returning of a paid note is no gift. Neither does God in his word ever speak of any payment as ground, or reason, for forgiveness of sins.

Furthermore, the sacrifices of the Old Testament could not express a penal suffering instead of the sinner. The Old Testament offerings and sacrifices were partly bloodless ones, consisting of fruits and the like, and partly bloody ones, consisting of animals, such as lambs and oxen. Of course, sheaves of grain, and other fruits of the earth could not suffer punishment. Hence, only the bloody offerings and sacrifices can here come under consideration. These were partly such as had in view the reconciliation of sinners, when they had sinned: as the burnt offering, sin offering, and trespass offering, that is, the expiatory or atoning sacrifices in general; partly such as were intended to express a person's gratitude to God for help received. That these latter offerings -- that is, the meat offerings, and the peace or thank offerings (which last-named also were bloody ones, Lev. 3)--did not express a vicarious penal suffering is easily understood; because by them it was not a question of atoning for sin, but of expressing gratitude for favors received. But from these we see directly something which is of the greatest importance as to the question of the meaning of the sacrifices: to wit, that we must never draw the conclusion that a sacrifice expressed penal suffering just because it was bloody.

But let us proceed to consider the sacrifices which were offered for atonement. God's ordinance concerning these sacrifices is such, that it excludes every thought of vicarious penal suffering. For, in the first place, sacrifices were never allowed to be made for other sins than such as were not to be visited by death, or capital punishment. Thus, for instance, sins against the ten commandments were never to be atoned for by sacrifices. Sacrifices were never to be made for idolatry, sabbath breaking, adultery, etc. But if sacrifices were allowed to be made only for

such sins as were exempt from death, or capital punishment, how then could any one think that the animal which was offered suffered the punishment of death instead of the offender? Why, his sin was not at all liable to be visited by the death penalty. Secondly, in a case of poverty the atoning sin offering might consist of fine flour (Lev. 5:11). But if the sin offering had been intended to express penal sufferings, then it could never have consisted of flour, for how could offerings of flour express penal suffering?

Nor did the laying of hands on the victim (of which we read in Lev. 4:15,24; 16:21) signify that the penalty was transferred to the animal. This we can see, in the first place, from the fact that such laying on of hands occurred even in the case of the peace or thank offerings, where there was no question at all of penalty (Lev. 3:2,8,13); in the second place, from the fact that in Lev. 16 the laying on of hands is clearly represented to be an expression of the confession of sin (verse 21). Besides, on the Day of Atonement the hands were not laid on the animal which was killed, but on the one that was kept alive. If the laying on of hands had been intended to symbolize a transferring of punishment, it could never have taken place on the goat which was to remain alive.

But what then did the Old Testament sacrifices mean? Let us therefore examine how God Himself in His word explains their meaning.

First, then, we notice that it is never said in the Old Testament that atonement, or reconciliation, was effected by the death of the sacrificed animal. No, atonement was effected by the blood. And the blood is not explained as a type of, or a figurative expression for death, but as a type of, and a figurative expression for life; as the Lord says in Lev. 17:11: "The life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul." (The last clause is better rendered by the Revised Version: "that maketh atonement by reason of the life"). Notice that the atonement is not ascribed to the blood by reason of the suffering or death which shedding of it had caused, but by reason of (or through) the life that is or was in it. And not by the shedding of the blood was atonement made, but by the sprinkling of the blood. But what did this sprinkling signify? It signified cleansing or purging from sin, as the apostle says: "Almost all things are by the law purged with blood" (Heb. 9:22). This, then, is what the type which lies in the Old Testament

sacrifices corresponds to: namely, atonement is made for a sinner, or a sinner's reconciliation takes place, by his being cleansed from sin.

This significance of the sacrifices, that they should cleanse from sin, we find with special clearness set forth in the great sacrifice on the Day of Atonement, which sacrifice was the sum of all the sacrifices that were offered for sin. As we read in Lev. 16, Aaron was to make an atonement for himself and for his house by the blood of a sacrificed bullock and by the sacrifice of a ram (verses 3,6,11), that is, he should cleanse himself and his house from sin, that he might afterwards be fitted to make atonement for the people. After that he was to take two goats, and kill one of them as a sin offering for the people, but present the other one alive before the Lord (verse 10). Then first with the blood of the bullock, afterwards with the blood of the killed goat, he was to enter into "the holy place within the veil, before the mercy-seat," and sprinkle it (the blood) upon the mercy-seat and before the mercy-seat. When he had come out from the inner holy place, then he was, in like manner, to sprinkle the blood upon the tabernacle (the outer holy place), and particularly upon the altar there (verses 14-19). And mark, God calls these actions "to make atonement for the holy place," "to make atonement for the tabernacle," and "to make atonement for the altar." But how does He explain this atonement? Is it explained in such a way that God should thereby become gracious toward the holy place, the tabernacle, and the altar: No, but this is what is said in verse 16: "And he (the high priest) shall make an atonement for the holy places because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions in all their sins." But if we wish to know what it means to make an atonement for the holy place "from" sins (that is, "for", "as to", or "because of" sins), then we are plainly told, in the 19th verse, that it means to "cleanse it, and hallow it from the uncleanness of the children of Israel." Here, then, not a word is said about appeasing, or propitiating, or reconciling God. No, all had for its aim the blotting out of sins and the cleansing of the sinner. It is God, the ever faithful Jehovah, the God of Israel, who in the sacrifices of atonement reveals Himself as the One who atones for, or cleanses, His sinful people from all their sins.

THE NEW TESTAMENT VIEW OF THE SACRIFICES

But what have the apostles seen in the sacrifices of the Old Testament, and how have they, in their New Testament writings, applied the doctrines which they found in them?

In Heb. 2:17 we read: "In all things it behoved Him (that is, Christ) to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation (the Revised Version has "propitiation") for the sins of the people." The apostle does not say that His work as high priest was "to propitiate God," but, "to make propitiation for the sins of the people." But how was this to be done? As the high priest, during the times of the Old Testament, in a typical manner made atonement for sins by sacrifices, which act was explained to mean that he sanctified and cleansed sinners from their sins; so Christ, as the true high priest, was by means of His blood, to cleanse sinners from all their sins. As John says: "The blood of Jesus His Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7); and when once all His work shall have been consummated, then there shall stand around His throne a great multitude, which no man can number, a multitude of human beings pure and holy like Himself. And were you to ask how they have become so pure, they would answer that they "washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Rev. 7:14). Mark, not that they by the blood of Jesus have appeased God; no, but that they in the blood of Jesus have washed their robes. Yea, perhaps you will stand there among the multitude--will you?

But especially in the 9th and 10th chapters of Hebrews it is permitted us to look more deeply into the mystery of the Old Testament sacrifices in the light of the New Testament, "But when Christ came as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered in through the greater and more perfect tabernacle... through His own blood, once for all into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling them that have been defiled, sanctify unto the cleanness of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ... cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God" (verses 11-14, Revised Version). What were the sacrifices of goats and oxen meant to do? To appease God? No, but to sanctify the unclean unto an outward cleanness. To effect any spiritual cleansing, or to make the worshippers perfect as touching the conscience, that they could not do (verse 9). But the sacrifices of the Old Testament were only types. In

the New Testament there is a better sacrificial blood, the blood of Jesus Christ, who through the eternal Spirit has offered Himself unto God; and what was its significance according to the apostle? Did he say: "How much more, then, shall the blood of Christ appease God, so that again it may be possible for Him to be gracious unto us"? No, but he did say this: "How much more shall the blood of Christ cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God." Hence, here also we have the same doctrine, the same blessed gospel of God. To cleanse -- to cleanse from sin, that is the power of the sacrificial blood in the New Testament.

To the sacrifices of the Old Testament also the apostle John has reference when he says: "And He (Christ) is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours (the believers) only, but also for the whole world." Mark the words. They do not say: "He has paid, or purchased a propitiation, for our sins." Further, it is not written: "This or that work of Jesus is the propitiation." It is not written: "His sufferings and death constitute the propitiation." No, but this they say: "He is the propitiation" -- He Himself in His own person. But what does that mean? We can learn the meaning of this from John 11:25, where the Lord says of Himself: "I am the resurrection, and the life." Now, what does that mean? Why, that He is the one that raises the dead, and quickens them to life. David often says of God: "He is my peace," "my salvation," "my consolation," etc., that is, He is the One that gives me peace, saves me, and consoles me. Well, then, He as the divine Saviour is that person who through His blood "propitiates sinners from their sins" -- that is, He propitiates sinners so that they get rid of their sins, He cleanses and sanctifies them from their sins. And this is indeed just what a sinner needs. O think how beautiful and comforting the reference of the apostle is, when he refers the one who sins to such a Saviour who really sanctifies and cleanses sinners from all sins.

The apostle uses the same manner of expression when he says in another place: "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10). Mark the words again. Foremost the apostle puts love -- not our love, but God's -- that love he puts at the head of the atonement. There everything begins: "God is love" (verse 8). Who were they whom God loved? "Us," the apostle says; and by that little word he means himself and those to whom he wrote. Hence, his words in this passage have reference to

believers. But that which he here says concerning them, is true also concerning the world, as we see from John 3:16: "God so loved the world." But what, then, did God do on account of this His love? He sent His Son to be a propitiation as concerning our sins" (thus literally rendered), and "as concerning the sins of the whole world" (I John 2:2). There you see how the apostle speaks of God, not as one who for Himself demands satisfaction, but as one who sacrifices His Son, in order that He may atone for, that is, blot out, our sins.

Hence, also in the New Testament there is the same explanation of the sacrifices. Mark how everything in this matter aims at this: to eliminate or clear out from humanity that deadly poison--sin--which satan has injected into us, and to restore us unto God so thoroughly clean and holy as He originally had created us. And this through the blood of Christ, by making us partakers of the life of Christ, as the apostle John says: "The blood of Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin" (I John 1:7). As sin has been for us a poison causing our death, so the blood of Christ is for sin a poison causing its death and our quickening in righteousness. O my soul, rest and breathe here. Take deep breaths of this heavenly air, for great is your God, and great are His works. Praise be to God forever for His unspeakable gift.

MAN, NOT GOD, MUST BE RECONCILED

When we started to speak of reconciliation, we raised the question if it was God, or man, or both parties, who was, or were, to be reconciled. Now we have searched the Bible and have found that it does not speak of God as being reconciled. The love of God had not been diminished through man's sin, so that it needed to be improved, increased or restored; nor could God's hatred of sin be done away with, for if He did not hate sin, He would not be righteous; neither could God's displeasure to those who live in sin be done away with, because even yet, this very day, God is displeased with all who live in sin. No change has taken place in Him. He remains the same; with Him there is "no variableness, neither shadow of turning." He is the eternally faithful, unchangeable God, whose name is Jehovah (that is, "I am that I am").

On the contrary, man needed to be reconciled to God. But before we proceed further to speak of this, we will here remark that the Bible has two different terms to express the idea of atonement, or reconciliation.

One of these terms is used to express what is generally translated "atone for sin" or "atone for sinners from (or, as to) their sins", that is, blot out sin, or cleanse and sanctify sinners from their sins. Concerning this we have already spoken. The other term is used to express what is generally translated "reconcile sinners to God." The meaning of this word ("reconcile") is, properly, to bring anyone into a different, into a right, relation to anyone. Just as it is never said, "atone (or, make atonement) for God or for the wrath of God," so it is never said, "reconcile God to sinners," but always, "reconcile sinners to God." This we can also easily understand. God had never come into any wrong relation to men, and therefore He never needed to be brought again into a right relation to them. On the contrary, men had come into a wrong relation to God, and they therefore needed to be brought again into a right relation to Him.

Behold here an illustration. If an arm be wrested out of joint, and thereby comes into a wrong relation to the body, it becomes useless for the work for which it was created, and must suffer much pain. If it is to be healed, and to be freed from pain, and fitted for its work, it must be brought again into a right relation to the body. In a similar manner man has through sin come into a wrong relation to God, has thereby become incapacitated for all the good where unto he was created, and has fallen under the dominion of death. Man was so created that he cannot be happy without God. In Him we live, and move, and have our being," says the apostle (Acts 17:28). To be, in a spiritual sense, severed from Him is therefore death and unhappiness -- a terrible unhappiness. If the sinner is to be saved at all, his salvation depends on his coming again into a right relation to the God who has given him his life. This is reconciliation, the reconciliation of man to God, not the reconciliation of God to man.

The Scriptures testify that man, as estranged from God, is carnal. It is not the Spirit of God that fills and rules him, but the flesh. But "the carnal mind" ("the mind of the flesh," according to the Revised Version) "is enmity against God," says Paul (Rom. 8:7). That is the chief trouble; not this or that transgression or misdeed; nay, but the very mind, is enmity against God: "for it (that is, this mind) is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can it be." Of the same thing the apostle speaks in Col. 1:21, where he says to the Christians: "Ye were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works." "The wicked works" of the ungodly are never isolated; they are expressions of the wicked, or evil

mind. And the evil mind is enmity against God. This the natural man will never admit. Even though he may admit that now and then in his life and in his works he may be at fault or be mistaken, still he will hold that in the depths of his heart he is good. But no, says the apostle, the natural mind itself in man is enmity against God. It is a terrible judgment which the apostle by these words pronounces upon all that bears the name of man; but it is a true judgment.

In short, the heart of the world is estranged from and dead to God, averse to him; and this makes it unblest. Here, as we have said, a reconciliation must take place, a reconciliation which brings man into an entirely different relation to God, if he is to become happy. But how, then can such a reconciliation be brought about? By the removal of sin, and by the justification of man. That which separates must be removed. Otherwise there can be no reconciliation. But that which separates is sin. From this fact we understand why "the reconciliation of the sinner to God" always depends on "the atonement of the sins," that is, on removal of the sins. We repeat it again: By being cleansed from sin, the sinner comes into a right relation to God. In no other way can such a relation be brought about.

"THE WORK OF RECONCILIATION"

Now let us consider some passages in the New Testament which speak of man's reconciliation to God.

"If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." Thus saith the apostle in 2 Cor. 5:17. He and all the believers of his time were, consequently, new creatures, new men; their old manner of life in sin was ended, and a new mode of being had begun. Their entire relation to God, to the world, to sin, was different than before. And thus it was by their being "in Christ," he says. "In Christ" is an expression constantly recurring in Paul's letters. All that the Christians are, all they possess, do, and expect -- all this the apostle refers to this center: Christ. Their peace, their life, their strength, their hope, their salvation -- all depends on their being in Christ. But to be in Christ is to believe in Him, for through faith the sinner yields himself to Christ, and becomes one with Him. "But," the apostle adds, "All things are of God." It is He who is the source of all this blessed change. And in what way had God brought it about? Why, in this way: that He has

"reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ." There you hear: only by the way and means of reconciliation had this great salvation come to them, to wit, that they had become reconciled to God, and had thus come into a right relation to Him. And who had brought this about? God, the heavenly Father. And by, or through, what means? By, or through, Jesus Christ. Just think how plain and simple. It was not Christ, who had reconciled God to them, but it was God who had reconciled them to Himself by and through Christ.

But when Paul says, "hath reconciled us," whom does he really mean by "us"? Perhaps the whole world? By no means. He explains directly after, when he adds: "And hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation." Indeed this cannot be said of the whole world. Now, throughout this whole section of the epistle the apostle is speaking of his own position. Hence, by the words "we" and "us" he means himself. But beyond this plain literal reference of the words, they can be applied to all such persons as stand in the same relation to Christ as the apostle did. They are all reconciled to God by Christ.

"Because" -- thus the apostle proceeds -- "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself." In verse 18 the apostle had said that that which had taken place in and with him was all of God. To this someone might object saying: "It was not of God, but of Christ, that this took place." But "no, no," the apostle would answer; "it is all of God, because it was God who was in Christ, engaged in reconciling the world unto Himself." The entire work of reconciliation is of God, who dwelt and worked in Christ, therefore it is He who through Christ has reconciled to Himself every man who is reconciled.

"The world," says the apostle -- "reconciling the world." The work of Christ, or the work of God in Christ, did not limit itself to a certain few previously elected ones, but extended itself to the whole world. All sorrow which simple souls cause themselves on the question as to whether, perchance, they belong to the elect or to the non-elect, is entirely needless, yea, really hurtful, and causes not only unrest and spiritual weakness, but sometimes even disorder of mind. Though from some passages in the Bible it might seem as if God had destined only certain ones to be saved, it is nevertheless always a false conception of such

passages when they are interpreted or understood in evident conflict with the definite testimony of the Bible that the work of Christ holds good for all men. "God so loved the world that He gave His Son." The word "world" does not mean a certain part of mankind, but all mankind, all men, without any exception. God wills the death of no sinner. Consequently He has manifested Himself in Christ for the purpose of reconciling all to Himself. What He has predetermined is this, that whosoever believeth in the Son shall be saved. (See John 3:15-17; 12:47; I John 4:14; Acts 2:21; Rom. 10:11-13). There has never been found on earth so bitter an enemy of God, that God would not reconcile him to Himself.

"In Christ," says the apostle. God's entire work of salvation is, so to speak, comprehended in Christ. In Him God is summing up all things (Eph. 1:10, Revised Version); in Him all fulness of the Godhead dwells, and by or in Him God has created all things (Col. 1:16,19); in Him and in none other, therefore, is there salvation (Acts 4:12). No one can come to God, or be reconciled to God, but by Him. Such is the testimony of the Scriptures in the most unambiguous terms.

But seeing it was God who was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, you can in Christ see also a truly beautiful and lovely image of God. All the work of Christ was directed towards the restoration of sinners from their sins, towards bringing them back to God. You will never find, either in His words or in His works, a single thing wherein this does not plainly appear. Never will you find a single instance where He in any way seeks compensation or satisfaction for Himself; but His entire life and work are given to sinners, in order to seek and save them, to arouse them to a consideration of their needs, to blot out their sins, to subdue their enmity, and to bring them again into a right and good relation to God. With this His heart was aglow, in spite of all their own bitter opposition. Well, then, consider now that it is God, the heavenly Father, you thus see in Christ, that it is He who does and works all this in Christ, for it is He who is in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself. Oh! how dear and precious to your heart you will find God to be when you thus behold Him in Christ. Because in Christ you have the true manifestation of Him.

Thus in the preceding verses the apostle had set forth that it was God who dwelt and worked in Christ, and that His work in Christ aimed at the

reconciliation of the whole world to Himself. Every man's reconciliation to God is therefore a work of God Himself through Christ (verse 18). After the apostle himself had been reconciled, he had from the same God received "the word of reconciliation" (verse 19). And now he was an ambassador of God for the sake of Christ.

But the apostle's saying, "We are ambassadors for the sake of Christ," that was not saying merely as much as, "in Christ's stead," but it is saying vastly more. When the aged Abraham sent his faithful servant Eliezer to his native country, in order to procure a wife for Isaac (Gen. 24), then Eliezer was Abraham's ambassador for the sake of Isaac. Lo, similar is the case also here. The apostle was the ambassador of God for the sake of Christ: his embassy concerned Christ, the cause of Christ, the kingdom of Christ, the glory of Christ, the presenting of a bride to Christ (2 Cor. 11:2). When the apostle preached the gospel he did not merely look upon the misery of men in their sins, or upon their need of salvation, but still more -- in the very first place -- upon the cause of Christ. The real motive power in his missionary activity was not so much this thought, "It is demanded for the salvation of lost men, which is the chief matter concerned," but rather this thought, "It is demanded for the glory of the name of Christ, which is chiefly concerned, -- to wit, that He may be honored, that His Kingdom may be extended until all things, according to the promise of God shall be put in subjection under His feet." (See 1 Cor. 15:24-28; Heb. 2:8). The first of these motive thoughts is, indeed, good; it can also mightily excite the feelings, and thus spur on the believer to activity. But it cannot give him the true steadfastness and perseverance, nor the true power of victory. If, on the contrary, his heart is filled with this great thought, that his work concerns the glorification of the name of Christ and the extension of His dominion, then this will give him the right kind of power and persistence to devote himself to the work, and to sacrifice all, yea, to go through fire and water, if need be, in order to lay all men at His, Jesus', feet.

In a similar strain the apostle expresses himself in Rom. 1:5 where he says that through Christ he had "received grace and apostleship, unto obedience of faith among all the nations, for His name's sake," that is, for the purpose of glorifying His name. Here we see again the great principal object on which his eyes were fixed first and last, to wit: to glorify the name of Jesus by subduing the nations (Gentiles, heathen) to Him in the

obedience of faith. Most certainly the Gentiles' own salvation was an important matter also to the heart of the apostle; but the highest aim it was not. The highest aim was the glorification of Christ, as we have just said. This way of regarding the work of missions is now somewhat uncommon; but we understand from this what it means that the apostle was God's ambassador "for the sake of Christ."

"As God is entreating by us," the apostle adds (2 Cor. 5:20). Again he affirms that it was not he himself, but God, who was entreating. Since God has sacrificed His only begotten Son, in order to reconcile the world to Himself, He now by His ambassadors entreats, that is, invites, prays, exhorts, the world to allow itself to be reconciled to Him, and not to continue its enmity. And yet He has not become weary, but age after age He is, through the gospel, reaching out His entreating hands to sinners. Oh, what a God! Can this be the God of whom we, by nature, are so afraid of Him, as if He would do us some evil? Yes, just He is the one. God entreats, prays, -- mark and hear again: God is begging and entreat you, "Be reconciled to Me." Have you the hardihood to resist?

"We beseech for Christ's sake." Thus also the apostle prays, because he is of one mind with God. He does not threaten and storm, but he prays and beseeches. And whom does he beseech? He beseeches the world, the entire ungodly mass of humanity that is still lying dead in trespasses and sins, that it might be willing to be reconciled to God. He beseeches you -- you who still are living without God in the world. He beseeches on behalf of God, for it is God who has given him the commission, the embassy. And he beseeches for Christ's sake. He repeats here the expression, "for Christ's sake," or "for the sake of Christ." Not merely for your own sake, but for Christ's sake, he beseeches you. As if he would say: "It is not only your own salvation that is concerned, but also the fulfillment of those promises which the Father has given to His only begotten Son, that He shall have the nations for His inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession" (Psa. 2:8). Nothing can be more effectively moving than this. Just think how everything is accumulating to the point of penetrating and stirring the depths of your heart:--the glory of Christ is concerned, -- your own salvation is concerned, --God entreats and Paul beseeches, "Be reconciled." -- And you -- what are you doing? Have you still the hardihood and power to say, "No"? Is there not something stirring in your heart that inclines you to

say, "Yes"? Do you dare to suppress it?

The prophet Joel (in chap. 2:12 and 13), after having proclaimed the drawing nigh of a punitive judgment of the Lord, sets forth the following words of the Lord: "Yet even now, saith the Lord, turn ye unto Me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: and rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for He is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy, and repenteth Him of the evil" (changes His threats of punishments, on the conditions before named). And in Isaiah 45:21 and 22 the Lord says: "There is no God else beside Me; a just God and a Saviour; there is none beside Me. Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." In Ezekiel 33:11 we read: "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die?"

Whoever you may be -- in the eyes of God you are too precious to die and perish. Therefore, turn and be reconciled to God, and you will be saved. Thus God entreats and implores, and He wants an answer -- an answer today, an answer from you. O say, what answer will you give Him? Have you the heart to answer, "No"?

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